

St. Cloud Times

Minnesota Continues to Play with Real ID

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Minnesotans are traveling on borrowed time.

The state's residents are still easily boarding airplanes and accessing many federal buildings with their driver's licenses for now, but only because of a federal extension of the rule known as Real ID. On Jan. 22, 2018, that extension runs out.

Real ID was passed by Congress in 2005, during the administration of George W. Bush. It sets out minimum proof-of-identity requirements for issuing state drivers licenses and ID cards used to access most federal facilities or board a flight in the U.S. Its purpose is to ensure that state-issued identification cards can be trusted to represent who they purport to, in short.

Minnesota is one of five states that has not made progress toward meeting the standard. We need to leave that club.

Opponents of Real ID have for years offered arguments about why it's a bad idea. Those points range from the reasonable — concerns about federal overreach into state matters and worries about a national database of identifying documents open to employees of every DMV in the nation, as argued by the Cato Institute as far back as 2008 — to the absurd: Some opponents have contended Real ID is tantamount to the biblical “mark of the beast.”

But the hangup in Minnesota is rooted in immigration policy. Gov. Mark Dayton wants to use the Real ID issue to open the door to drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants, but Republicans in the Legislature aren't having it: The Minnesota House passed a bill in February barring that idea. The Minnesota Senate rejected a similar Real ID bill 38-29 earlier this month on the strength of Democratic opposition to the immigrant license provision — and a few Republicans who wanted to put Washington on notice that we don't take kindly to ultimatums here.

To be clear: States may reject Real ID compliance. But if they do, their residents will incur all manner of hassle in return, and some not-insignificant expense. Employees of Minnesota's Fortune 500 companies will need a passport, enhanced drivers license or membership in a “trusted traveler” program like Global Entry to board a plane for a one-hour flight to Chicago. Parents will have to shell out more money (and plan far ahead) to get a passport or enhanced

drivers license for their college student who wants to spend spring break in Lake Havasu, Arizona, or Padre Island, Texas. Church mission groups will need to factor such expenses into their plans to do summer mission work in Los Angeles or Mississippi, if they're going by plane. And anyone who has business in a federal building or nuclear power plant is likely to need a Real ID-compliant document that they probably don't have.

It's clearly time to divorce Real ID compliance from state policy on undocumented immigrants. Those issues can be more effectively debated and resolved if they are addressed separately.

In just over 300 days, our borrowed time runs out.